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Navigating Fragile Peace: A Critical Analysis of the Challenges Local Peace Committees Face in Combating Cattle Rustling in Tiaty East, Kenya

JaneJean Jebiwot Too, Samuel Mwiti Njagi, and John Wakhungu Masinde

Abstract

This study explored the challenges Local Peace Committees (LPCs) face in combating cattle rustling in Tiaty East Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya. While previous research has focused on police challenges, this study addresses the understudied role and constraints of LPCs as primary actors in conflict resolution. Conflict transformation theory was adopted to guide the study's examination of the dynamic nature of cattle rustling and how LPCs could help bring peace by focusing on multiple peace approaches in conjunction with addressing the root cultural causes of cattle rustling. The research adopted a case study design, utilizing a qualitative approach within an interpretivist paradigm. Data was collected from LPC members, non-governmental organizations, faith-based organizations (NGOs/FBOs), security agencies, opinion leaders, and local administration in Tiaty East. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected 30 respondents for key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The findings identified numerous challenges LPCs face. These include political interference and patronage; a lack of adequate facilitation; high levels of illiteracy among LPCs and the wider community; hostilities and threats from cattle rustlers and the community; regressive cultural practices that romanticize cattle rustling; boundary disputes and corruption within LPCs and the security agencies responsible for combating cattle rustling. The study concluded that despite their presence, the capacity of LPCs in Tiaty East and the North Rift zone to navigate the fragile peace and effectively combat cattle rustling is substantially hindered by these challenges. It recommends enhanced capacity building for LPCs, formal legal recognition of LPCs within security frameworks, and the implementation of community-level integrity vetting processes.

Keywords: Combating cattle rustling, conflict resolution, Kenya local peace committees, peacebuilding, security.

Introduction

Conflicts have been part of human history since ancient times (Afolaranmi, 2021). While various governmental and non-governmental actors have been involved in peace efforts, there is a growing recognition of the importance of local actors in addressing the root causes of conflicts and developing practical approaches for conflict resolution (Saaida, 2023; Van Leeuwen et al., 2020). Particularly, on a global and regional scale, Local Peace Committees (LPCs) have played a significant role in conflict resolution through their involvement in negotiation, mediation, and reconciliation processes.

In the Kenyan context, in the wake of Al-Shabaab terrorist attacks and prevalent interethnic clashes, the state commenced the devolution of local-level capacities to ensure peace and security (Kioko, 2017). Specifically, the state has allotted LPCs the rights to engage in crime prevention and address certain local conflicts to formalise an element of customary law (Kioko, 2017). Consequently, they have proven effective in peace-building and conflict resolution in Kenya (Walobwa, 2023). Nonetheless, despite their success, LPCs are yet to obtain formal recognition in averting violence (Walobwa, 2023), a gap that the current study intended to address by bringing awareness to their efforts and the challenges they encounter while navigating peace processes.

Particularly, these committees have been especially essential in the North Rift Zone, especially the Tiaty Constituency, which has gained notoriety for its violent history concerning cattle rustling. Over time, the nature of cattle rustling in this area has undergone significant changes. It has transformed from a cultural practice involving simple bows and arrows into an organised criminal activity characterised by the use of highly sophisticated weapons, leading to extensive casualties and destruction (Gumba et al., 2019; Gumba, 2020; Interpeace & NCIC, 2021). As a result, numerous LPCs have been established within this area, key among them being the District Peace Committee (DPC) framework - an initiative that set up 20 district peace committees in the North Rift area - and the Rift Valley Local Empowerment for Peace Program (RLEFP). RLEFP was instituted in 2009 to promote reconciliation and prevent violence by working with the North Rift youth to bolster local conflict management skills and boost their economic opportunities. With this knowledge, the current study picked Tiaty East as its area of study due to the availability of operating LPCs within the region, which suggested that this area could provide the researcher with adequate respondents to discuss the challenges they face in combating cattle rustling. However, before exploring these challenges, there was a need to understand the effectiveness and successes of these LPCs.

According to research, between 2019 and 2022, LPCs achieved some success in creating periods of relative stability and peace in parts of the North Rift, leading to

increased interactions between communities and the reopening of roads and schools (Interpeace, 2023). Nonetheless, these peace gains were undermined by a new surge in violence, which took the form of counterattacks between the government and armed groups. It also took the form of commercialised livestock raids, which further derailed peace processes between the West Pokot, Elgeyo Marakwet, Turkana, Samburu, and Baringo communities (Interpeace, 2023). This information led the current study to look beyond the immediate violence within Tiaty East in Baringo County and evaluate underlying drivers that could have been derailing peace processes. To achieve this goal, the conflict transformation theory was adopted to guide the study's examination of the dynamic nature of cattle rustling and how LPCs could help bring peace by focusing on multiple peace approaches in conjunction with addressing the root causes of cattle rustling. Thus, the previous research showed a need for a critical analysis of the challenges that may have derailed and continue to derail the progress of LPCs in combating cattle rustling and bringing peace to the North Rift region.

Problem Statement

For decades, the insecurity stemming from cattle rustling in Tiaty East and the wider Baringo County has been a pressing concern. Since January 2024, Tiaty East has seen an escalation in attacks and cattle rustling, which have resulted in the closure of markets and schools, loss of livelihoods, and displacement. This is evidenced by the county government closing five livestock markets in March 2024 in Tiaty East in an effort to curb cattle rustling, banditry and the ensuing insecurity (Kenya News Agency, 2024). To help curb this problem, youth from Tiaty East collaborated with other young persons from Baringo South, Baringo North, and Tiaty West sub-counties to form local peace committees (LPCs) to end cattle rustling and the consequent inter-ethnic community conflicts (Koech, 2022). In addition, as aforementioned, LPCs like the RLEFP have established within the wider North Rift zone. However, despite the emergence of these committees, peace has remained elusive in the Tiaty, with the path to attaining lasting peace complicated by the persistence of cyclical violence and the region's complexities, including issues of ethnicity, polarising politics, climate change-induced competition for resources, and intimidation of communities living in conflict-prone zones for territorial control (Metcalf, 2022). Nonetheless, despite this problem's perpetuation, the role of LPCs, as the primary line of defence, and the challenges they encounter in combating cattle rustling has not been adequately understood. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the challenges that LPCs face in preventing and managing conflict in Tiaty.

Research Objective

This study's specific objective was to explore the challenges LPCs face in combating cattle rustling in Tiaty East Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study could have significant implications for policy and practice in the region by identifying the challenges requiring mitigation for LPCs to effectively combat cattle rustling. The study could also inform the development of more effective strategies for addressing cattle rustling in the North Rift region of Kenya by closing loopholes that have hindered lower-level security operations and providing insight into the constraints hampering peacebuilding efforts by other significant non-state actors, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs), and FBOs. Therefore, this study's results could aid local and national governments in navigating the fragile peace in Baringo by strengthening LPCs and helping them address challenges that may impede their effective functioning in combating cattle rustling.

Scope and Limitations

The focus of this research was to explore the challenges LPCs face in managing conflicts, with a particular emphasis on Tiaty East Sub-County in Baringo County. The study focused specifically on this geographical area because it is characterised by a persistent cattle rustling problem. Alternatively, constraining the study's geographical scope to one sub-county could have brought about a limitation in the results' generalisability to the rest of Kenya. However, given that the cattle rustling problem is predominantly centred within the North Rift region, this limitation did not significantly affect the study's generalisability. In addition, some respondents were reluctant to provide information. However, they were assured that their identity would remain confidential. Likewise, the harsh terrain and incidents of insecurity curtailed extensive travel to meet more respondents in the interior regions of the study site. However, the researcher's and research assistants' knowledge of this area helped mitigate this limitation.

Literature Review

■ Theoretical Framework

▲ Conflict Transformation Theory

The conflict transformation theory underpinned the study. John Paul Lederach is recognised as the theory's developer with *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* being his most notable work (Lederach, 1997). Lederach perceives conflict as an interference in the natural flow of relationships, where a different lens views conflict as stemming from underlying forces and causes. He further endorses looking at conflict from a 'bigger map' by utilising a conceptual framework that links the immediate conflict situation to the deeper relational patterns and looking beyond the presenting problems toward the contextual factors affecting the conflict.

The theory further perceives conflict transformation from a multi-track, multi-approach with long-, medium-, and short-term perspectives. From this perspective, conflict transformation can be considered a multi-faceted approach by stressing that it is a dynamic, multi-actor, and multi-dimensional process. Notably, instead of concentrating on a single approach to resolve conflict, the theory employs several “lenses” to respond to and understand the intricate issues that cause it. In this light, the study can perceive conflict transformation as requiring the efforts of several actors ranging from community leaders to the broader society.

This theory also entails a process that shifts from conflict-prone systems to peace systems (Lederach, 1997). It concentrates on the underlying sources of the problem, the process, and the people involved. It also tackles the institutions, cultures, and structures that foster conflict. The study borrowed from the premise that the cattle rustling and conflict in Tiaty East, as well as the challenges that LPCs face in handling this problem, could stem from cultural, political, and institutional issues like corruption, lack of training, and weak governance.

Specifically, the theory can be applied in Tiaty East to go beyond cattle rustling and evaluate the deeper cultural, relational, and structural patterns that sustain it. In this light, the cattle rustling problem can be perceived as often being driven by structural elements like inequality and marginalisation, weak governance, and commercialisation. On inequality and marginalisation, cattle rustling can be attributed to structural inequalities, including a lack of access to public services, infrastructure, and development opportunities that can be exacerbated by resource scarcity. On weak governance, the absence of a strong state presence within remote areas in Tiaty East could also be contributing to the problem. The theory further perceives conflict drivers as changing over time, where applying the framework to the cattle rustling problem in Tiaty East can explain the transformation of cattle rustling from traditional cattle raiding, where the practices were utilised for purposes like restocking herds following a drought or dowries, to a large-scale criminal activity driven by an upsurge in illicit arms within the region.

Additionally, the theory can link the cattle rustling problem to relational and cultural patterns. Notably, the theory acknowledges that ingrained cultural patterns are essential to evaluate. Thus, it would be essential to evaluate how the pastoralist culture in Tiaty East could be legitimising cattle rustling within the region. Therefore, from this theory, the study analysed the information collected in relation to how cattle rustling is driven by institutional, political, cultural, and relational problems.

Empirical Review

A review of current knowledge of the challenges LPCs face in combating cattle rustling showed that most literature on this subject matter focused on the challenges the police faced. For instance, Murkomen (2015) analysed the effect of policing strategies in combating cattle rustling in Tot Division within Marakwet East Sub-County. The research involved 49 respondents, stratified and chosen from the local elders, women, and youth, and 28 police respondents from different police units in the region, whereas 14 key informants were purposively chosen from CBOs, NGOs, local churches, and provincial administration. Semi-structured questionnaires, field observations, and a key informant interview guide were employed for data gathering. The study uncovered that elders and seers utilised oath-taking and curses to keep upcoming raiding operations secret, which hindered the police capacity to obtain information on illicit guns and light weapons. Compounding the issue, the local population often perceived cattle rustling as a legitimate activity and an essential part of their cultural way of life. As a result, it was difficult for the police to get precise information from the residents. Moreover, the police were unsure whether to detain highly armed robbers during or after a raid, which eventually affected the feasibility of prosecuting the suspects. However, the study did not clarify the research design and data analysis methods utilised.

The fight against livestock rustling also faced obstacles due to inadequate legal and policy frameworks. Research indicated that ambiguous legal frameworks challenged police officers when charging cattle rustlers (IGAD, 2020; Said, 2020). While the police were aware of laws and acts that can be used to combat cattle rustling, such as the Penal Code, Sexual Offences Act, Firearms Act, and the Prevention of Organised Crime Act, they found that the Penal Code contains provisions applicable to crimes like robbery with violence, arson, murder, and livestock theft. Yet these provisions are not specifically tailored to address cattle rustling. However, these results stemmed from an analysis of secondary data and thus may have some limitations, including the risk of data gaps, probability of data irrelevancy, unknown bias and data quality issues in original sources, and potential outdatedness. To circumvent these pitfalls connected to secondary data research, the current study adopted primary data to realise the study's research aim.

Additionally, security operations, including the retrieval of stolen animals after raids, were frequently hindered by the region's rugged topography and inadequate infrastructure, such as roads and telecommunications networks, causing delays (Gumba et al., 2019; Mkutu, 2008). However, the slow response to attacks close to security camps was perplexing, along with the ironic situation where Kenya Forest Service (KFS) officers allowed livestock rustlers and bandits to evade capture once they entered forests (Gumba et al., 2019). Due to the perceived inadequacy of security measures, local leaders, including chiefs and members of

the LPCs, were concerned for their safety and were hesitant to pursue stolen cattle or expose known criminals, fearing retaliatory violence based on past experiences (Interpeace & NCIC, 2021). Nonetheless, the three sources (Gumba et al., 2019; Interpeace & NCIC, 2021; Mkutu, 2008) consisted of a book and reports, meaning a lack of thorough peer review and quality appraisal that journal articles are afforded.

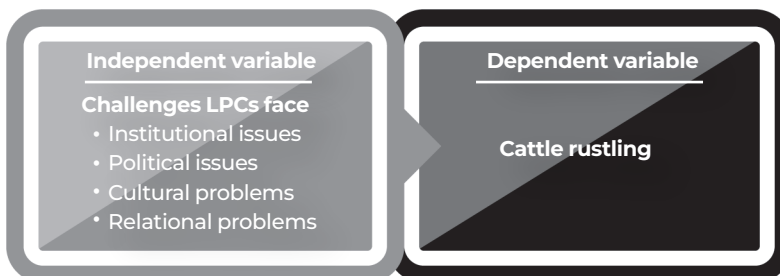
Generally, the reviewed studies showed that the police were subjected to numerous difficulties in addressing and combating cattle rustling. These difficulties included the secretive nature of raid practices, the local communities' perceptions of cattle rustling as a legitimate activity that is ingrained in their culture, an unclear framework for detaining cattle rustlers and inadequate legal and policy frameworks, and topography issues. The dynamic nature of these problems echoed the conflict transformation theory that alluded to the cattle rustling problem as a multi-dimensional problem that has deeper cultural, relational, and structural patterns that sustain it.

Furthermore, besides possessing the pitfalls associated with secondary data, the review discovered a lack of peer-reviewed journal articles dedicated to LPCs and the challenges they are subjected to in combating cattle rustling. In addition, a review of the literature on LPCs and the challenges they face in combating cattle rustling discovered very limited research on the subject. Furthermore, the majority of the existing studies addressed the challenges the police force encountered in combating cattle rustling, thus exposing a knowledge gap regarding LPCs. As such, this study aimed to tackle this gap by moving past the existing police-centric research and focusing on local peace committees. It also addressed the unexplored area of LPC's challenges by exploring the challenges LPCs face in combating cattle rustling in Tiaty East, Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

The study considered the challenges LPCs face as the independent variable and cattle rustling as the dependent variable. These challenges entailed institutional issues like corruption, political issues, cultural problems, and relational problems between the LPCs and other community members.

FIGURE 1 ◀ Conceptual framework



Research Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a case study research design. A case study design was chosen because it allows for in-depth, context-specific investigation of complex phenomena within real-life settings. Given that cattle rustling and LPC challenges are deeply embedded in local contexts - involving cultural, political, and institutional dynamics - a case study approach enables holistic understanding that would be impossible through other designs. By utilising various data sources, permitted by the research design, the researcher gained a profound understanding of the persistent cattle rustling phenomenon and explored the challenges LPCs face in addressing this problem.

Methodology and Methods

The study's philosophical positioning was interpretivism because it aimed to gather people's experiences regarding the challenges LPCs face in combating cattle rustling. Furthermore, the fact that the interpretivist research paradigm is closely connected to qualitative data collection methods, validated its use in the study. Accordingly, the study employed a qualitative research approach. This approach was suitable for the study as it enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges LPCs face in combating cattle rustling by capturing people's perceptions, experiences, and mindsets regarding the phenomenon.

Data Collection

Tiaty East Sub-County in Baringo County was the preferred study site for the research. Tiaty East Sub County has a population of 73,400 (KNBS, 2019) and seven wards (Kolowa, Tirioko, Ribkwo, Loiyamorok, Silale, Churo/Amaya, and Tangelbei), and 31 sub-locations. The Silale, Churo/Amaya, and Tangelbei wards in Tiaty East Sub County formed the study site because they were prone to cattle rustling and bordered other areas that persistently face cattle rustling, such as Silale and Kapedo areas.

From this population, the target population for this study consisted of LPC members, NGOs/ FBOs in the area, security agencies such as National Police Service (NPS), ASTU, the Directorate of Criminal investigation (DCI), Kenya Defence Forces (KDF), RDU, and General Service Unit (GSU), opinion leaders (MCAs, women, youth, and PWDs representatives), and local administration (village elders, chiefs, Assistant County Commissioners (ACC), Deputy County Commissioners (DCC). From the selected wards of Silale, Churo/Amaya, and Tangelbei wards of the Tiaty East Sub-County, the target population was distributed as shown in Table 1 (*next page*).

■ Sampling

The researcher used purposive sampling to select participants from each subgroup in Table 1 until reaching the target sample. Derived from the targeted population of 150 respondents, the study's sample population was 30 respondents. This sample size aligns with Creswell's (2014) recommendation for small-scale studies, suggesting that an ideal sample size ranges from 20 to 30 respondents.

TABLE 1 ■ Target and sample population

Classification	Estimated Target Population	Sample Population
LPCs	78	9
Security Agencies (DCI, NPS, RDU, KDF, ASTU, GSU)	6	6
Opinion Leaders representatives from the three wards	12	5
NGOs/FBOs/CBOs	10	3
NGAO representatives (DCC, ACCs, chiefs & Assistant chiefs)	42	6
County Government official representatives	2	1
Total	150	30

Source: Researcher (2025)

■ Instruments

This study utilised both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected using in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The interview guide contained open-ended questions designed to explore the issues and concerns to be discussed. Key informant interviews were one-on-one sessions between the researcher and identified respondents, allowing respondents to express themselves freely. In this study, key informant interviews were conducted with the County Police Commander for Baringo, Deputy County Commissioner Tiaty East Sub County, and opinion leaders within Tiaty East Sub-County to represent the views of the community members, LPCs members, NGAO, and programme officers of selected NGOs/FBOs/CBOs.

One FGD session was conducted with eight participants from the Amaya, Silale, and Kapedo areas since they experience frequent cattle rustling activities within Tiaty East Sub-County and cross-border cattle raids and movements. The objective of this dialogue was to leverage the social dynamics of the group to elicit participants' underlying beliefs, views, and motivations related to their

behaviour or a specific issue. Participants were identified through the assistance of the area's local administrators, and village elders. The demographic factors of the participants, such as age, marital status, gender, and occupation, were taken into consideration.

The FGD sessions were moderated or facilitated by the researcher, with trained research assistants taking notes of the discussions. Additionally, the researcher gained insights into significant issues not covered in the key informant sessions by facilitating interactions among participants. On the other hand, secondary data was gathered from county government publications, periodicals, academic journals, works by other scholars, and other unpublished works like minutes of Peace Committees.

■ *Piloting*

A pilot study involving three respondents (10% of the sample population) was conducted. This piloting exercise was carried out in Ribkwo Ward because it was not part of the target population and, hence, would not affect the actual data collection or the results. The three respondents helped determine the effectiveness of the interview and focus group discussion guides in gathering reliable data.

■ *Ethical Considerations*

The researcher sought authorisation from relevant organisations before the commencement of data collection. First, the researcher got clearance from the National Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). When meeting respondents for the FGD and in-depth interview, the researcher sought their consent to participate in the study, where they were informed of the study's aims, procedures, and significance. The study participants were given assurances of anonymity and confidentiality and told that their participation was voluntary. The researcher also observed research ethics by avoiding overly sensitive questions. Additionally, consent was sought from the identified organisations before the commencement of the study.

■ *Data Analysis*

Data in its raw form is of limited value; thus, the researcher examined it methodically to extract meaning that may provide insight into the subject under investigation. After getting all the information from the respondents, the researcher, with the assistance of trained research assistants, put the information together, sorted the data, coded it, and assigned themes. The data was then analysed thematically using NVivo software and presented as thematic narratives that provide details of research findings and recommendations.

Findings

The findings revealed a lack of facilitation, boundary disputes, high illiteracy levels, political interference, hostilities, and corruption as challenges that hamper LPCs from seamlessly performing their duties. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that political interference, hostilities towards LPCs, illiteracy level, and cultural factors had relatively equal significance. Additionally, respondents emphasised the detrimental impact of corruption and boundary disputes on the performance of LPCs. These factors collectively influenced the effectiveness and functioning of LPCs, as reported by the respondents.

■ **Lack of facilitation**

In this context, the facilitation of LPCs included stipends, training, and capacity-building provisions. According to the study findings, a key informant revealed that the lack of facilitation and stipends to cover airtime and transportation expenses demoralises LPCs from fulfilling their responsibilities, as they cannot attend crucial peace meetings. Another respondent highlighted that LPCs rely on walking to travel due to the vastness of the area, resulting in significant delays in conveying urgent messages that require immediate action. Furthermore, another respondent in a FGD session said:

Despite LPCs' willingness to serve, they lack the necessary skills and training in peace and conflict resolution and often rely on their intuition to address persistent issues including cattle rustling. (KII 2)

During a session with a key informant, an alternative perspective on logistical support for LPCs was presented. The informant explained that when individuals or organisations, such as construction workers, wish to operate in the area, the chief introduces them to the LPCs and requests them to provide a small payment to the LPCs. This payment serves as a means to allow the operation to proceed without criminal interference.

■ **Low literacy levels**

In the study, respondents emphasised the significant impact of low literacy levels on various aspects of LPCs. They expressed concerns regarding the language barrier faced by LPCs, which hindered their effective communication during peace meetings, often requiring the involvement of translators or the use of sign language and gestures. Furthermore, the low literacy levels among LPCs and within the community were identified as a challenge in sharing security information with relevant government agencies, leading to the loss of intended meaning. The study also highlighted the low school enrollment of children in the community, which further reflected the prevalence of low literacy rates in Tiaty. The following narratives from respondents provide support for this statement:

The language/communication barrier between neighbouring communities mainly hampers LPCs' ability to pass intended peace information to the warriors in forests and valleys due to the lack of a common national language like Kiswahili. Gestures and signs are primarily used carefully to avoid misinterpreting meaning, which may spark deadly shootouts. This is because of the lack of translators owing to high illiteracy levels (KII 15).

Furthermore, another key informant shared the following insight:

There are very few Pokot children enrolled in schools, and instead the youth who herd livestock for their parents are employed for cheap labour and eventually marry early. Due to the responsibility that comes along with family, they are forced to engage in raids to support their families (KII 8).

■ **Political interference and patronage**

The research findings revealed that cattle owners in the region encompass politicians, professionals, senior security personnel, and government administration officers. Consequently, one respondent expressed regret that efforts to combat cattle rustling would not succeed, as these cattle owners orchestrate the operations to benefit themselves. Another respondent (KII 10) added that some cattle owners provide logistical support to their herders, such as supplying them with arms, ammunition, protection, financial assistance in case of arrest, medical treatment in case of injuries, and markets for selling stolen livestock. The study also identified the herders themselves as the individuals who carry out the actual act of cattle rustling. The following excerpt provides support for these narratives:

Some rogue Pokot professionals working for governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations and some holding higher/senior ranks also encourage banditry activities by facilitating smuggling and supplying arms and ammunition. Some who are medical officers provide medical services to wounded Pokot cattle rustlers. They do this by constantly communicating with commanders of bandits and cattle rustlers (KII 10).

Similarly, another participant reiterated the aforementioned opinions, stating that:

The powerful owners of the livestock are Police officers, politicians, and Pokot professionals. They are the ones who encourage this cattle rustling menace. They get loans and buy firearms and ammunition and ask the young herders if they have the ability to acquire their own livestock by stealing, they can do so. That is why issues related to operations in this country (Kenya) cannot succeed (KII 15).

■ **Hostilities**

The study brought attention to the hostilities experienced by LPC members, which included threats and resistance from community members who perceived them as traitors. These factors were identified as major barriers to the effectiveness of LPCs in addressing the problem of cattle rustling. Several respondents shared instances where LPCs and chiefs were physically assaulted by criminals who accused them of being government informants. Another respondent (KII 11) highlighted that, as LPCs are part of the community, they might be hesitant to identify criminals and hand them over to security forces due to fears of potential retaliation and harm.

■ **Influence of Culture**

The study findings revealed that the enduring presence of cultural traditions within the Pokot community posed a significant challenge to the effectiveness of LPCs, known as *poyii* in the Pokot language. According to some respondents, the community continues to perceive cattle rustling as a cultural tradition and placed tremendous faith in the *laibons* (spiritual leaders/seers), who are believed to predict the success of raids, bless warriors during such activities, and help them evade detection and arrest.

Another respondent (KII 10) pointed out that in Pokot culture, names are given to individuals who have killed prominent figures through a cultural ceremony known as *lopat moyil*. The Pokot community values killing enemies, and those who carry out successful raids are highly respected community members. Additionally, Pokot youth are encouraged to become warriors by engaging in cattle raids, as the community regards livestock as a symbol of status, pride, and prestige. Men with large herds of cattle hold leadership positions, and young men cannot marry unless they have accumulated enough cattle for dowry. This cultural tradition promotes cattle rustling, which is considered a demonstration of courage and heroism, leading to respect and honour from the community.

Furthermore, respondent (KII 10) observed that youth who have undergone the circumcision rite of passage, which takes place every ten years and involves initiating over 10,000 youth as an age set, subsequently engage in cattle rustling activities to acquire livestock for dowry. The current age set, *Murukutwo*, initiated in April 2016, aims to acquire more wealth and livestock, surpassing the achievements of the previous age set, *Kaplelach*.

■ **Boundary disputes**

The study uncovered that longstanding territorial boundary disputes have significantly contributed to hostilities, population displacement, and cattle rustling. Consequently, these issues have directly impacted the effectiveness of LPCs in fulfilling their mandate. One respondent explained that over the years, members of the Pokot community have encroached into Mukutani location, particularly in parts of Rugus, Salabani, and Meisori areas on the western

side of Mukutani, which were historically used by the Tugen and Ilchamus communities for farming. As a result of this encroachment, the location is currently governed by two chiefs, one from the Ilchamus community and the other from the Pokot community. The respondent added that recent insecurity in the area was triggered by Pokot herders from Tiaty who joined their counterparts in Mukutani and carried out raids on the Tugen and Ilchamus communities. Due to these circumstances, the Pokot community even threatened and opposed the appointment of an Assistant County Commissioner (ACC) in Mukutani Division, protesting that the division should be recognised as part of their territory (East Pokot).

Another respondent echoed these sentiments and added that in Tiaty East, there is a location called Makutano, which has some linguistic and cultural connections to Mukutani, symbolising a meeting point. There is an overlap in the area, and there is a chief for Makutano serving the Pokot community and another chief for Mukutani serving the Ilchamus community. The situation arose when Pokot leaders with political interests became involved, and some Pokot professionals who held administrative positions used their influence to advocate for the creation of Makutano location. They were interested in Mukutani due to its favourable climate, permanent rivers, and good pasture. Historical issues began to resurface, and the Pokot community asserted that they have traditionally grazed their livestock up to Arabal areas near Marigat, claiming that the entire territory deep into Marigat division belongs to them. These claims are compounded by perceptions of marginalisation, where the Pokot community views their area as neglected and excluded from political seat sharing for county-level positions such as the woman representative, deputy governor, and majority leader. Based on these grievances, they are advocating for the creation of their own county called East Pokot County.

■ **Corruption**

This theme explored the detrimental effects of corruption on the effectiveness of LPCs in addressing the issue of cattle rustling. The study findings revealed that some individuals within the local government administration, civil service, political sphere, community professionals, and even some LPC members engaged in corruption. These compromises involved practices such as bribery, the sharing of stolen goods, and interference with the work of LPCs, all of which negatively impacted the LPCs' ability to fulfill their responsibilities. The following statements from the respondents provide support for this observation:

As I had told you, the livestock mainly belong to the National Government Administration Officers (NGAO) like chiefs, MCAs, MPs, Heads of government parastatals, and KDF commanders who usually work as a community and, at times, prevail upon the chief to assist in smooth movement of their livestock. You find that the LPCs would be compromised and would not do the work as they

are mandated because of pressure and community interests and may not be effective (KII 14).

Another respondent said that:

At times, LPC members also side with bandits for their interests. Some LPC members reportedly spied for Pokot bandits who move from Paka hills, Naude, and Silale location of Tiaty East to undertake livestock raids in Baringo North Sub-County. The compromised LPC members collect information from the other LPCs and transmit it to Pokot bandits, who use it to evade security personnel during livestock raids (KII 10).

Discussion

According to the study, LPCs encountered various on-the-ground challenges that hindered their ability to fulfill their mandate. The first challenge was the lack of facilitation, where the members of LPCs lacked the essential resources such as stipends, training, and capacity building to effectively perform their obligations. According to an IGAD (2020) report, building LPCs' capacity through training in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is essential for their success. Similarly, a study carried out in Nairobi County identified the lack of resources in the form of logistic and financial resources as presenting a grave challenge to the LPCs' functionality (Mungai et al., 2020). These findings reveal a trend of LPCs operating with inadequate resources, thus demonstrating that LPCs' effectiveness in combating cattle rustling and preventing conflicts in Tiaty East and Kenya, in general, can be enhanced by equipping these LPCs with essential resources for optimal functioning.

Low literacy levels and culture were also highlighted as challenges affecting LPCs' functionality in combating cattle rustling in Tiaty East. The study articulated that low literacy levels hindered LPC members' communication during peace meetings and in sharing security information with relevant government agencies. Regarding culture, the study outlined that the persistence of traditional practices prioritising livestock as the sole economic activity and the perception of cattle rustling as a cultural tradition, where engaging in cattle raids was considered necessary for youth to become warriors, were key factors contributing to cattle rustling. These findings corroborate previous research (Gumba, 2020; Gumba et al., 2019; Mkutu, 2008). These scholars also identified these cultural and illiteracy causes as significant contributors to cattle rustling, posing challenges that LPCs alone may not fully overcome.

Boundary disputes and hostilities were also identified as challenges to LPCs' functionality. In particular, the study found that boundary disputes are commonplace not only in Tiaty East but also in the entire North Rift region. Existing reports support these findings by showing boundary disputes as ingrained in the entire

North Rift region. For instance, continual boundary disputes have been observed at Kapedo, Lorogon, Kases, Ombolion, Alale, Nyangaita, Takaywa, and Amolem in Turkana East and South (Kikechi, 2023). Baringo County declares that their territory includes Lomelo and Kapedo, while the Turkana County disagrees with this assertion (Awuor, 2023). In addition to the boundary disputes, the LPCs had to deal with threats and resistance from community members who perceived them as traitors, which significantly hampered their capacity to tackle the cattle rustling problem in Tiaty East. Finally, it is also worth noting that while these hostilities sometimes discouraged LPC members from sharing information that might help prevent conflict with local law enforcement officers. At other instances, they were reluctant to identify criminals and hand them over to security officers because the accused were members of their communities.

Finally, the study findings identified political interference and patronage and corruption as inhibiting LPCs' proper functionality. The findings showed that certain members of the law enforcement, local government administration, political domain, and even some LPC members were corrupt and engaged in bribes and sharing stolen items, which adversely affected the LPCs' capacity to perform their responsibilities. In addition, several obstacles to prosecuting offenders in the fight against cattle rustling were also reported. These challenges included difficulties in collecting substantial evidence, navigating unclear legal frameworks, and the secretive nature of the Pokot community, which tends to shield cattle rustlers. These factors created significant barriers to holding perpetrators accountable, which were further compounded by the reliance on circumstantial evidence by judicial officials, which added another layer of complexity to the successful prosecution of offenders. Therefore, despite the fact that LPCs have proven effective in conflict resolution, in Tiaty East and the broader North Rift region, there is a need to mitigate these challenges for these benefits to materialise.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to explore the challenges LPCs face in combating cattle rustling in Tiaty East Sub-County, Baringo County, Kenya. The findings established that the effectiveness of LPCs was hindered by various grassroots challenges. These challenges included political interference and patronage, lack of adequate facilitation, high levels of illiteracy among the LPCs and the wider community, hostilities arising from threats faced by LPCs from both cattle rustlers and the community, regressive cultural practices that romanticised cattle rustling, boundary disputes, and corruption within LPCs and security agencies responsible for combating cattle rustling. These challenges created a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) environment in which LPCs and other state and non-state actors had to navigate to work together seamlessly.

Therefore, the study concluded that despite the existence of LPCs in Tiaty East and the North Rift zone, their capacity to navigate the fragile peace within the region and effectively combat cattle rustling was substantially hindered by numerous challenges.

Additionally, from these findings, several recommendations arose. From a policy viewpoint, the study recommended that enacting a national policy on peacebuilding and conflict management through the parliament. This is essential to ensure that LPCs are effectively integrated into the government security structures and granted a legal mandate to operate. The study also recommended that the Baringo County government rethink the strategy of LPCs regarding training, formation, and facilitation to provide clear guidance and enhance their effectiveness in fulfilling their mandate. Lastly, at the community level, the study recommended rigorous vetting processes to ensure that the individuals selected by the community as their representatives possess high integrity. This measure is crucial to safeguard the progress made in combating the issue of cattle rustling and preserve the milestones achieved.

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